

# Making Christian colonists

## An evaluation of the emigration policies and practices of the Scottish churches and Christian organisations between the wars<sup>1</sup>

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By 1914 Scotland, like the rest of the British Isles, had incorporated assisted emigration into a variety of philanthropic ventures which attempted, from both a national and a regional perspective, to alleviate problems of overpopulation, unemployment and destitution. In the absence of state welfare provision, churches and charities shouldered the burden of rescuing and rehabilitating needy men, women and children, particularly from the overcrowded and anonymous cities, where statutory relief barely scratched the surface of an endemic poverty sometimes aggravated to epidemic proportions by specific economic crises. Undergirding the relief programmes of most of these charities was an evangelical Christian commitment to offer both practical and spiritual help to needy individuals, increasingly reinforced by a eugenic confidence that the future of Britain and the empire could best be secured by the judicious transfer of suitable recruits from the debilitating environment of the mother country's city slums before their constitutions had been irreparably damaged.

None of these sentiments was eroded either by World War I or by the embryonic beginnings of state-funded welfare before and after the conflict, although eugenic arguments steadily, if sometimes imperceptibly, superseded Christian concerns. Organisations which were established as part of the late Victorian enthusiasm for evangelical philanthropy continued to combine domestic rescue work with assisted emigration throughout the 1920s, when they were joined by a variety of new enterprises eager to capitalise on the shared funding opportunities made available under the Empire Settlement

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an abridged version of issues raised in M. Harper, *Dreams and Dilemmas: Scottish Emigration between the Wars* (Manchester, forthcoming).



Act. As before the war, the main recipients of relief remained disadvantaged children and youths, along with women, although the Salvation Army had a wider remit. By examining the activities of voluntary societies it is possible to identify continuities and changes in both the theory and practice of assisted emigration in the inter-war years, to evaluate the impact of state involvement in this sphere of well-established, but hitherto private, assistance, and to appreciate the paradoxical attitudes of Scottish institutions which with one breath bewailed the drain of population and with the next advocated empire settlement.

### **Protagonists and Antagonists: The Ideological Debate**

The historian of charitably assisted emigration is well served by contemporary and retrospective literature. Dependent on promotional pamphlets and attractive annual reports to stimulate public interest and donations, the voluntary agencies' regular publications contained both theoretical justifications and practical examples of their work, often incorporating letters from satisfied emigrants. Their schemes were also largely endorsed by the press and public opinion in the late Victorian and Edwardian upsurge of imperialist fervour, as well as by hagiographical biographies and sponsored academic studies.<sup>2</sup> Different sentiments were sometimes expressed in Canada, which until the 1920s received most of the emigrants, but tended to ostracise them as the degenerate dregs of British city slums than the deserving victims of economic misfortune. After the war reservations about charitable emigration were increasingly expressed in Britain, mainly by politicians who challenged the whole *raison d'être* of the movement rather than pragmatists who simply questioned the emigrants' suitability. Once their work was sanctioned and underpinned by state subsidies, charitable emigration societies were invested with much greater political sensitivity, and as a result were

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<sup>2</sup> Hagiographical studies include J.H. Batt, *Dr Barnardo: the foster father of "Nobody's Children"* (London, 1904) and J. Urquhart, *The life story of William Quarrier: a romance of faith* (Glasgow, 1900). A.G. Scholes, *Education for Empire Settlement. A Study of Juvenile Emigration* (London, 1932), was sponsored by the Imperial Studies Committee of the Royal Empire Society, and has supplied much of the general factual information for this paper.



praised and vilified by imperialists and socialists respectively in parliament and press, official investigations, and monographs. Most of the debate centred on juvenile emigration, which has also been the theme of several more recent studies. Some modern studies have drawn on the extensive archival holdings of the societies, as well as recruits' recollections, in order to produce well-documented assessments of the emigrationists' aims, achievements and limitations in the context of their time, while others have favoured an overtly antagonistic approach which counteracts the hagiographies prevalent in the early twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

By 1918 most of the evangelical architects of juvenile migration had died. Pre-war pressure to increase overseas recruitment under the English Poor Law, coupled with rising imperialist sentiments and a growing belief that juvenile emigration in particular could "not merely palliate, but actually solve the problem of unemployment",<sup>4</sup> all paved the way for state intervention after 1918. The concept that domestic and overseas rescue work should be integrally related had been established by philanthropists well before the origins of the welfare state, and from about 1909 Australia and New Zealand began to compete with Canada, developing their own assisted immigration schemes and lobbying the imperial government for financial assistance. In 1910 the Royal Colonial Institute organised a conference on emigration, attended by representatives of 50 organisations, some of them of recent origin. A standing committee was appointed to press for state support, in a climate in which for the first time juvenile migration received significant government support. It was therefore no surprise that advocates of collaboration after 1918 built on these foundations to promote state-aided empire settlement as

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<sup>3</sup> The first category includes publications such as G. Wagner, *Barnardo* (London, 1979), Wagner, *Children of the Empire* (London, 1982), A. Magnusson, *The Village. A History of Quarrier's* (Quarrier's, 1984), and J. Parr, *Labouring Children. British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1914* (London, 1980), while an example of the second category is P. Bean and J. Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire* (London, 1989). *The Home Children*, ed. P. Harrison (Winnipeg, 1979) makes extensive use of recruits' reminiscences, but adopts a balanced approach.

<sup>4</sup> Speech by Professor W.L. Grant, *Report of the Conference on Emigration Convened by the Royal Colonial Institute*, May 1910, 88, in Scholes, *Education for Empire Settlement*, 67.



a vehicle for achieving social reform and economic harmony, particularly after Milner and Amery were established at the Colonial Office and the effects of post-war depression began to be felt.<sup>5</sup> But the emigrationists' determination to relocate town-dwellers in rural situations was not simply based on the economic argument that those removed from urban squalor and deprivation would – especially if they were young, malleable and well-trained – be transformed into colonial producers of raw materials for British markets and consumers of British manufactured goods; it was also a reflection of their continuing confidence in the eugenic efficacy of rural colonial life as a means of retaining lost British values.

Such confidence was not universal. Opposition to the alliance between emigrationists in the state and voluntary sectors came, as before the war, from colonial authorities and citizens, particularly in Canada, who complained about the calibre of the recruits and the difficulty of securing adult employment for emigrants who had outgrown their youthful placements. "Van boys from Glasgow, butcher boys from Dundee and news boys from Bristol" were not welcomed in the Dominion,<sup>6</sup> where the Canadian Council on Child Welfare under its leader, Charlotte Whitton, collected sensational but sometimes questionable statistics from asylums, jails, VD clinics and reformatories, and campaigned for a complete cessation of the movement. Perhaps the rescue societies had only themselves to blame for the hostility of the Canadian press and public towards home children, since in their fund-raising propaganda they tended to highlight the contrast between the initial degeneracy of recruits and their subsequent rehabilitation.

Juvenile immigrants failed the test of desirable immigrants on every score. As the dregs of British society, their fares

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<sup>5</sup> S. Constantine, "Empire migration and social reform", 1880-1950, in *Migrants, emigrants and immigrants: a social history of migration*, edd. C.G. Pooley and I. Whyte (London, 1991), 72.

<sup>6</sup> National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), RG 76, vol. 271, file 768363, part 1, Canadian Immigration Department correspondence, Nov. 1929 & Feb. 1930, quoted in P.T. Rooke and R.L. Schnell, "Imperial Philanthropy and Colonial Response: British Juvenile Emigration to Canada, 1896-1930", *The Historian*, vol. XLVI, no. 1, Nov. 1983, 71.



underwritten by charity and government subsidy, their placement in rural Canada a payment for their poverty and dependence, and without a commitment to the land, these children and youths had no redeeming qualities. On this point labor representatives and middle-class spokesmen agreed. The reception and treatment of British juvenile immigrants witnessed the blurring of class lines and contributed to the development of specific assumptions about the nature of Canadian society and prerequisites for final membership in it.<sup>7</sup>

Opposition in Britain was based partly on the practical argument that wartime mortality and a falling birth-rate had solved the problem of overpopulation, while the Adoption Act of 1920 and later the payment of allowances to single mothers further reduced the number of candidates.<sup>8</sup> A more child-centred approach to young people's welfare also led to demands that problem children should not be separated irrevocably from their families and surroundings, and sent to the empire as cheap labour, but should be rehabilitated at home. Such arguments predated the war, as did socialist opposition to child migration, but were given added momentum with the election of a Labour government in 1924. Labour politicians, fiercely critical of a policy which they claimed was both ill-founded and deliberately designed to inhibit the extension of state welfare provision, regularly raised the issue in Parliament. J.C. Wedgwood and H. Snell were particularly adamant that the funding allocated to the "deportation" of excess population to the empire should have been used to tackle domestic unemployment, and castigated their opponents for their unseemly determination – born of expediency – to emigrate other people's children to distant parts of the world. On one occasion Wedgwood tackled Sir C. Kinloch-Cooke on the grounds that "the parents and relations of these children would prefer to have them settled on the land of this country rather than go where they are apparently not wanted, and where they will have as great a difficulty in getting land as they have here. What we have to do to solve the problem of finding work for these people is to open up the resources

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<sup>7</sup> Rooke and Schnell, "Imperial Philanthropy", 77.

<sup>8</sup> Parr, *Labouring Children*, 151.



of this country, without bothering about sending them out to other parts of the world".<sup>9</sup>

The suicide of three "Home boys" in Canada in the winter of 1923 (and five similar deaths in Australia) led to the appointment of an investigative delegation, headed by Margaret Bondfield, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour in the Macdonald government. Other delegates were Mrs Harrison Bell, the TUC's representative on the Oversea Settlement Committee, that committee's chairman, G.F. Plant, and delegation secretary J. Garnet. During a six-week tour at the invitation of the Dominion government, they inspected receiving homes and situations in every province and talked to individual children, former children, and officials, investigating allegations about lax inspections and exploitation. Despite expectations to the contrary, the Bondfield Report gave a balanced assessment of juvenile migration, commenting optimistically on the settlers' condition and prospects, and highlighting the significance of secondary movement.

In many cases the children are regarded as members of the family and a real interest is taken in their future. Only in a very few instances did the delegation come across evidences of unhappiness, due possibly to the child proving unadaptable to its surroundings. Almost invariably the children stated that they were thoroughly happy in Canada and would, on no account, return to the Old Country. A number of the children interviewed anticipated their relatives joining them.... We have no doubt that the prospects in Canada for the average boy or girl are better than they would be in the United Kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, vol. 154, 15-31 May 1922, cols 913-4, 927; vol. 174, 26 May to 30 June 1924, col. 552; vol. 187, 27 July to 7 Aug. 1925, col. 148.

<sup>10</sup> *British Oversea Settlement Delegation to Canada, 1924. Report to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, President of the Oversea Settlement Committee, from the Delegation appointed to obtain information regarding the system of child migration and settlement in Canada (Bondfield Delegation)* (PP 1924-5. XV. Cmd. 2285).



The delegation was generally satisfied with travel and reception arrangements, placements, inspection and supervision procedures. On the other hand, there was room for some improvement in selection, in order to detect temperamental unsuitability, and the report claimed that training centres – on both sides of the Atlantic – were a waste of time and money, which should only receive official funding for the basic testing of applicants in Britain as a preliminary to selection. Distributing homes were urged to ensure that each child had a separate bedroom, or at least a separate bed, in a household of the same religion as itself, and societies should either work in separate spheres, or co-operate to prevent unsuitable households receiving children from different organisations. The delegation was also struck by the variation in wage rates arranged by different societies for children of the same ages and qualifications working under similar conditions, a disparity which, they pointed out, caused discontent among the emigrants, and could sour relations with their employers. Criticising the societies' tendency to make cheap wage agreements on the basis of the farmer's wishes, rather than their own estimate of the recruit's value, they recommended both that the societies confer with a view to standardising wages and working conditions, and adopt a firmer approach in the recovery of wage arrears from employers. The main reservation, however, was that children were rarely adopted legally into households, but were recruited as wage labourers when they were too young to work, to the detriment of their education and general well-being.

It seems to us that, recognising that the children are sent to Canada for working purposes, the general principle to be adopted is that the children should not leave this country until they have arrived at working age. At the same time there should be no undue interval between the date at which a child finishes school in the United Kingdom and the date of departure for Canada. The longer the interval in this case the more difficult will be the process of adaptation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.



In accordance with these recommendations, the Canadian immigration authorities in April 1925 fixed at 14 years the age limit for the migration of unaccompanied subsidised children. The legislation was enacted for three years initially, but in 1928 was made permanent as a consequence of the onset of worldwide depression, coupled with Charlotte Whitton's continuing opposition.

### **The Practice of Theory: Charitable Migration Schemes**

The 1920s saw both the consolidation of existing voluntary societies and the establishment of new ones, eager to take advantage of shared funding and play their part in securing the future of the empire through regulated migration. By 1914 the Salvation Army was described in advertisements as "the world's largest emigration agency".<sup>12</sup> Carefully regulated migration had been a pivotal part of William Booth's social strategy since at least 1890, and from 1901 the Salvation Army sent a few suitable recruits annually from its training farm at Hadleigh in Essex to Canada and Australia. In 1905 Henry Rider Haggard was appointed by the Colonial Office to investigate the feasibility of establishing Salvation Army colonies within the empire, and although Booth's vision of a specific overseas colony came to nothing, a separate Migration and Settlement Department was created in 1903 under the control of Colonel David Lamb, a native of Friockheim in Angus. Lamb remained in charge of migration work until his department was wound up in 1932, by which time he had been round the world four times and had visited Canada almost annually in pursuit of his work.

Such was the Salvation Army's reputation as a migration agency that within a month of the Armistice it had received nearly 6,000 applications from would-be emigrants. The Empire Settlement Act subsequently gave a new impetus to its work, which was singled out for particular tribute when the Bill was introduced into Parliament.<sup>13</sup> Encouraged by government grants and loans, the Army in 1923 undertook a new Boys' Scheme, whereby unemployed youths and those in "blind alley" occupations could apply for assisted emigration

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<sup>12</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 24 Aug. 1911; *All the World*, Oct. 1922, 427.

<sup>13</sup> *Hansard*, vol. 153 (10 Apr – 12 May 1922), 582.



as farm labourers. Successful candidates, aged between 14 and 17, were either sent to Hadleigh for three months' basic agricultural training before being shipped out to pre-arranged positions on colonial farms, or, in the case of Queensland and New Zealand, trained on arrival at Salvation Army farms near Brisbane and at Putaruru in Auckland. Once placed, the boys were visited regularly, and periodic progress reports were sent to the Army's London headquarters on over 5,000 boys who had been despatched by 1930, mainly to Australia.

The Salvation Army continued to operate largely autonomously, jealous of its reputation and fearful of the loss of goodwill and independence that might be entailed in collaborating too closely with the Overseas Settlement Committee. It continued to hold a licence as a passage broker's agent, and was not prepared to forego the commissions it received from steamship lines on the booking of passengers, believing that the success of its emigration work was reflected in widespread and long-standing public confidence in its methods.<sup>14</sup> The YMCA, on the other hand, became directly involved in assisted migration mainly as a result of the Empire Settlement Act. Throughout the Dominions in the 1920s it took the initiative in promoting the collective nomination of migrants, depersonalising and extending the established procedure of personal nomination, whereby individuals overseas proposed friends or relatives in Britain for assisted passages, and assumed responsibility for the after-care of their nominees. Like the Salvation Army, it had developed a sophisticated international network in the 19th century, including a heavy involvement with the reception and welfare of newly-arrived migrants through its network of hostels. Its recognition that the emigrant was "an international person without recognised international rights"<sup>15</sup> led to the establishment in 1909 of an

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<sup>14</sup> For further discussion of emigration under the auspices of the Salvation Army, see Anon., *Organised Empire Migration and Settlement* (London, 1930); D. Lamb, *Boys of Britain* (1923) and *General Booth's Scheme for Boys* (1925); and M. Harper, "Emigration and the Salvation Army", *Bulletin of the Scottish Institute of Missionary Studies*, ns, no. 3-4 (1985-87), 22-29.

<sup>15</sup> *The Scottish Red Triangle News*, Oct. 1924, 11. This publication changed its name to *Scottish Manhood* in October 1926.



Emigration Department within the YMCA World's Committee, a body which was revived with greater authority after the war. YMCA workers were placed in ports of embarkation and debarkation, and the Emigration Department liaised with the International Labour Bureau in order to create better transport facilities and employment opportunities for emigrants. YMCA welfare officers who sailed with the emigrant steamers organised shipboard recreation and instruction, as well as religious meetings, and at the end of the voyage made sure that the new settlers were put in touch with local YMCA officials or churches at their destinations.

Postwar legislation made it possible for the YMCA to move from passive supervisory and after-care work to a more active involvement. A London-based Migration Department was created in 1920 to marry colonial demand with British supply, and after the Department's General Secretary, Major Cyril Bavin, visited Canada, Australia and New Zealand in 1922 at the invitation of churches in those dominions, a co-operative scheme of Christian nomination was devised. Colonial churches and charities were encouraged to appoint local committees which, after liaising with employers and residents and obtaining guarantees of employment and accommodation, nominated eligible categories of settlers to its Government Immigration Department. Initial recruitment of individuals was then undertaken by the counterparts or agents of these organisations in Britain, although the final selection was, as always, subject to the approval of the dominion authorities. The local committees in the dominions assumed responsibility for the reception and after-care of recruits, and also undertook to find fresh openings for anyone unsatisfactorily placed in the first instance.

Such collaboration between the home and colonial churches was welcomed by the Overseas Settlement Committee, which was confident that "if we could enlist their full support the whole question of migration might be raised to a higher plane".<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, as Thomas Pollock, one of the YMCA's Migration Department Secretaries, pointed out, collective nomination not only inspired

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<sup>16</sup> G.F. Plant, *Oversea Settlement: Migration from the United Kingdom to the Dominions* (Oxford, 1951), 138.



greater confidence among migrants because it was less risky than individual nomination; it also strengthened the bond between the home and colonial churches, and “enables the Church to make her contribution towards the solution of some of the pressing problems of the day. It also ensures that spiritual contacts made at home will not be severed by reason of the change of locality, although this may be several thousand miles distant”.<sup>17</sup> Such issues seem to have been of particular concern to the Presbyterian Church of Australia, for when J.C. Milliken, the convenor of its Immigration Committee came to Scotland in spring 1926 to promote collective nomination, his visit was prompted partly by the alarming number of presbyterian migrants who, once in Australia, failed to establish contact with their Church.

Both the Salvation Army and the YMCA had more dealings with Australia than Canada in the 1920s, as the Antipodes became increasingly involved in assisted migration schemes. This trend was partly a continuation of embryonic pre-war developments, partly the consequence of the prohibitive Canadian legislation in 1925, but probably mainly a response to financial inducements, since under the Empire Settlement Act juvenile emigration societies were given a grant of £14 10s. per head to cover transportation expenses, as well as assistance with placement and after-care.<sup>18</sup> But whereas Antipodean enterprises such as the Dreadnought and Big Brother Schemes in New South Wales and Victoria respectively, or the New Zealand Sheepowners’ Fund, catered for boys who were sent out by solicitous parents rather than rescue homes, Canada continued to receive destitute and disadvantaged juveniles, alongside the new middle-class recruits who were received into institutions such as the Ontario and Alberta Agricultural Colleges. Barnardo’s was the first rescue organisation to resume migration work after the war, when in 1920 it sent a party of 155 to Canada, and shortly afterwards the Canadians began to operate their own voluntary societies. The most notable were the Quebec-based British Immigration and Colonisation Association, founded in 1924, and the Ontario-based agency of the United Church

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<sup>17</sup> *The Scottish Red Triangle News*, Sept. 1925, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Scholes, *Education for Empire Settlement*, 138; Parr, *Labouring Children*, 151.



of Canada, founded in 1927 and using the YMCA to select boys in Britain for despatch to its receiving home at Norval, Ontario.

### Scottish Initiatives

The theory and practice of philanthropic migration were regularly debated and explained in the Scottish press, and Scots participated fully in most of the ventures established before and after the war. The Salvation Army not only advertised extensively in provincial newspapers, but also sent officers on recruitment visits to regional citadels, as in January 1924, when Colonel H. Gladstone Miller selected at least twenty-four boys in Aberdeen, or in September 1927, when Colonel Lamb visited Inverness.<sup>19</sup> Quarrier's Orphan Homes of Scotland, which had begun to send children to Canada in the 1870s, resumed the practice after the war, albeit on a much reduced scale, and with an infusion of eugenic, imperialist sentiments added to its long-standing Christian principles.<sup>20</sup> Claude Winters, superintendent at Fairknowe, the Quarrier receiving home at Brockville, Ontario, was realistic in his admission that the work was "not all sunshine", acknowledging problems of unemployment, low wages and dissatisfaction resulting from economic depression. Yet he maintained a consistently high reputation for good placements and after-care, while simultaneously working hard to promote mutual understanding between the Canadian immigration authorities and a variety of other voluntary societies, and as late as 1930 he reported a keen demand for juveniles from Fairknowe, where "our family is largely undisturbed by the unemployment situation".<sup>21</sup>

Encouraged by government funding, the Church of Scotland became actively involved in migration schemes in the 1920s, both on its own account and in co-operation with other presbyterian churches and voluntary societies at home and abroad. Instead of simply ministering to the needs of Scottish exiles, and reporting on the

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<sup>19</sup> *Press & Journal* [hereafter *P&J*], 30 Jan. 1924; *Stornoway Gazette*, 23 Sept. 1927.

<sup>20</sup> The significance of emigration from Quarrier's Homes is discussed in M. Harper, "The Juvenile Immigrant: Halfway to Heaven or Hell on Earth?", in *The Immigrant Experience*, ed. C. Kerrigan (Guelph, 1992), 165-83.

<sup>21</sup> *A Narrative of Facts* (Quarrier's annual report), Emigration Report, 1930.



emigration taking place from its homes and hostels in response to deteriorating economic conditions, the Kirk in the 1920s made a determined effort both to improve the quality of the exodus and to influence its direction. Classified as a private organisation under the Empire Settlement Act, its involvement took the form of offering colonial training courses, and securing supervised passages and assured employment for emigrants whom it had helped to hand-pick. Training and selection procedures took due account of the dominions' unwavering emphasis on land settlement as the main vehicle for economic development, but also their preference that specific training of would-be farmers should be deferred until the emigrants had reached their destinations. Preparatory courses therefore consisted mostly of general instruction and testing in farming practices in order to eliminate unsuitable candidates before final selection took place, and the Church of Scotland was involved with two such institutions, Cornton Vale Farm Colony and the Craigielinn Farm Training School.

In 1907 the Church of Scotland had purchased the 30-acre Cornton Vale Farm at Bridge of Allan as a rehabilitation and training centre for destitute men. After being requisitioned by the Army during the War, it was returned to the Church and resumed its original function under the auspices of the Social Work Department. But the lack of suitable adult recruits, combined with the difficulty of placing Boys' Home trainees in employment in Scotland in the 1920s, soon led to a change of policy, and in 1924 the Social Work Department resolved to use Cornton Vale primarily to train young men between the ages of 18 and 30, with a view to their subsequent emigration. In 1926 the Department concluded an agreement with the Secretary of State for the Dominions under the Empire Settlement Act, to share the cost of testing approximately 100 would-be emigrants per year at the farm, and to assist jointly the passages of eligible candidates who could not afford to finance their own migration, and were not financed by the Poor Law Guardians or other public authorities. The convenor of the Social Work Committee was instructed to admit to Cornton Vale "only such men as are reasonably likely to prove



suitable for settlement overseas”,<sup>22</sup> and those selected for assisted emigration were to be single men proceeding to guaranteed agricultural work, who intended to settle permanently overseas.

In initiating the Cornton Vale enterprise, the Social Work Committee “confidently expected that there will be a useful and fruitful sphere for the Colony in work of this kind”.<sup>23</sup> This confidence was demonstrated in 1927 when, from a donation of £30,000 towards emigration made to the committee by retired Ceylon tea planter Sir Leybourne Davidson of Huntly, Aberdeenshire, £2,000 was assigned to Cornton Vale to extend and improve the buildings and a further £1,000 was made available to purchase more land. In the year following the windfall 51 youths and men successfully passed the emigration test after three months’ training, having their outfit, ocean passage, and landing money paid for by the Social Work Committee, which also guaranteed their employment for a year. In 1928-29 a record 67 of the 191 trainees who passed through Cornton Vale emigrated, including several men from depressed mining districts, and the regular receipt of “very cheering letters” from colonists in Canada and Australia continued to convince the Social Work Committee that it was performing a useful service. Only when unemployment beset the emigrants’ destinations did the scheme come to a premature end. In its report to the General Assembly in 1930, the Social Work Committee observed that while good reports had been received from that year’s emigrants – 30 to Canada and five to Australia – many other applicants had not been selected, having fallen short of the physical and intellectual standards set by Canada in particular. “The gates to Canada are not so wide and easy of access as they used to be”,<sup>24</sup> the report remarked ruefully, and at the end of 1930 Cornton

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<sup>22</sup> NAC, RG 76, C-10260, vol. 356, file 4006523, Cornton Vale Trainees. Agreement with the Church of Scotland Committee on Social Work for Providing the Cost of Transportation etc. (Empire Settlement Act).

<sup>23</sup> *Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland, with the Legislative Acts passed by the General Assembly, 1924 – Report of the Social Work Committee*, 887.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 1930 Report, 422.



Vale ceased to operate as an emigrant training and testing facility, reverting to its former status as a rehabilitation centre.<sup>25</sup>

While the Cornton Vale scheme was run directly by the Church of Scotland, through its Social Work Department, the Kirk was also peripherally associated with another, more sophisticated, farm training venture operated by the Glasgow philanthropist, Dr George Carter Cossar, CBE, MC. While Cornton Vale catered for men and youths over 18, his Craigiellinn Farm near Paisley trained juveniles between the ages of 14 and 18. In some ways Craigiellinn provided a model for the Cornton Vale operation, just as Cossar's venture was itself modelled on the earlier work of William Quarrier a few miles away at Bridge of Weir.

Born into a wealthy Glasgow family in 1880, Cossar attended Rugby School and Oxford, where he graduated in civil and mining engineering before retraining as a doctor during the First World War. His charitable conscience had been aroused when, in his student days, he had seen the plight of homeless men sleeping on the Thames Embankment, and in 1909, as a delegate of the Church of Scotland's Social Work Committee at the Winnipeg meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, he petitioned the Canadian Minister of Agriculture for financial assistance to relocate suitable trainees from Cornton Vale on Canadian farms.<sup>26</sup> On being given short shrift by the Canadian immigration authorities, which anticipated that the recruits would be "social derelicts who have been taken under the sheltering care of the Church",<sup>27</sup> Cossar turned his attention to juvenile migration. This was an extension of his existing rescue work among Glasgow youths, which had already seen him

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<sup>25</sup> Church of Scotland, *Minutes of the Committee on Social Work*, 17 Dec. 1930. Cornton Vale Farm functioned as a rehabilitation centre for destitute and delinquent youths and men throughout the 1930s. After the Second World War it was leased, and subsequently purchased, by the Scottish Home Department Prisons and Borstals Branch, and later became a women's prison. For further details on its history, see L.L.L. Cameron, *The Challenge of Need. A History of Social Service by the Church of Scotland 1869-1969* (Edinburgh, 1971), 27-9, 68.

<sup>26</sup> NAC, RG 76, C-10467, vol. 568, file 811910, part 1, Cossar and William Hunter to the Minister of Agriculture, Ottawa, 31 Aug. 1909.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, J. Bruce Walker, Commissioner of Immigration, Winnipeg, to Canadian Immigration Department, 1 Sept. 1909.



open missions and purchase a training farm, Todhill in Ayrshire, to instruct and then place boys in farm service at home or abroad.<sup>28</sup> His priority was to assist “the poorer lads of our city”, not least the 75 per cent of poor boys in Glasgow who were “Irish Roman Catholics”, and whose plight he felt was largely ignored, not least by evangelical philanthropists like himself.<sup>29</sup> To facilitate Canadian placements, in 1910 he purchased a 700-acre farm at Lower Gagetown, New Brunswick, to which recruits were sent for training, either directly or via Todhill, before being placed out with individual farmers in the province. In 1911 Cossar escorted his first recruits to New Brunswick, along with a man and wife from Stirlingshire to superintend the venture, and he subsequently purchased three adjacent farms to increase his holding to 1,000 acres. By 1913, when G. Bogue Smart, Canada’s Chief Inspector of Juvenile Immigration, submitted a report on the farm, 250 boys had passed through its doors, and by 1922 this had risen to 800. Although Smart suggested that Cossar was naive in expecting his recruits to repay their fares, he reported that each boy, when interviewed individually, had expressed enthusiasm for his work, and concluded that “Mr Cossar’s plan of supplying a good class of young Scotch immigrants is not only commendable but advantageous to Canada and deserving of encouragement”.<sup>30</sup>

Until August 1922 Cossar assisted emigration entirely at his own expense. Then, encouraged by the funding made available under the Empire Settlement Act, he purchased for £2,000, with the aid of private donations, the 36-acre Craigiellinn estate at Gleniffer Braes, Paisley, to be used as a basic training farm.<sup>31</sup> As before the war, trainees were to be mainly “city boys of the poorer classes”, who would be referred by schools, labour exchanges and presbyterian

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<sup>28</sup> Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, MC 2402, Vera Ayling Records. The administration of Todhill Farm was subsequently handed over to the Scottish Labour Colony, and in 1922 the Trustees decided that it should be devoted to training boys for farming careers in Scotland. (G.F. Plant, Oversea Settlement Office, to the Scottish Office, 18 Dec. 1924 (SRO, AF 51/171).

<sup>29</sup> NAC, RG 76, C-10647, vol. 568, file 811910, part 1, Cossar to W.J. White, Dept of the Interior, Ottawa, 3 Nov. 1909.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, report by G. Bogue Smart on Gagetown Farm, 15 Sept. 1913.

<sup>31</sup> *Glasgow Herald, Scotsman, Daily Record*, 3 Aug. 1922.



churches, as well as individuals, and Craigiellinn was given a grant in return for testing 100 boys per annum with a view to their permanent settlement as farm workers in either Canada or Australia. The 13-week testing was to involve, *inter alia*, “elementary agriculture, milking, horse harnessing, the care of stock and personal laundry and if possible cooking, shoe-mending and rough carpentry”.<sup>32</sup> Like Cornton Vale later, the school’s directors were to admit only those applicants who showed potential to be successful colonists, and from such trainees they were subsequently to make an initial selection of candidates for presentation to the colonial selecting authority. Boys were to be encouraged to contribute as far as possible to their maintenance and testing costs of 22 shillings a week, although inability to do so was not to prejudice their selection.

Eighteen months after its establishment on this subsidised basis, Cossar was in no doubt that his enterprise had made a successful assault on poverty and unemployment, and therefore worthy of supplementary public support. In appealing for £2,000 through the *Press and Journal*, he pointed out that of over 250 lads from all parts of Scotland tested at Craigiellinn, 160 had gone overseas, while others had been passed as fit and were waiting their turn to go.

Many of them, after several years of idleness, without the faintest prospect of work, are now amongst the real producers of the world and are earning good wages. Some are being joined by other members of their families. To read their letters from overseas, full of hope, with their accounts of steady work and good wages, is as good as a tonic in these depressing days.

They all have a good word for Craigiellinn and their experience there, and, if a lad is willing to work, he is bound to learn something with us that will be useful later. The Farm not only provides a training for the boys, but supplies them with an outfit, so that parents in really poor circumstances need pay nothing towards the equipment of their boys....

We invite any Christian worker who is interested in the welfare of the young to submit the names of likely lads, and

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<sup>32</sup> NAC, RG 76, C-7821, vol. 282, file 234636, agreement between the Secretary of State for the Colonies and Craigiellinn Farm, 28 Aug. 1922.



will be glad to show them some of the many letters received from boys and their employers in Australia and Canada that prove to us conclusively that the prospects we can offer to a willing lad are excellent.<sup>33</sup>

Cossar's interest was not limited to the impoverished, for he acted as a Scottish agent for the British Immigration and Colonisation Association from its inception in 1924, welcoming the opportunity both to orchestrate the migration of self-financing boys from affluent families, and to extend his influence by arranging placements in provinces other than New Brunswick. In July 1924 he accompanied his first such party to the Association's receiving hostel in Montreal, where 24 Craigiellinn trainees were joined by 12 self-funded boys for farm placements. At the same time his Gagetown farm was used by the Association as its reception centre in New Brunswick.<sup>34</sup> Cossar's conducted parties were regularly advertised in the Scottish press, and in June 1925 the CPR offered farm labouring openings to selected Higher Grade schoolboys who would emigrate under Cossar's auspices the following month.<sup>35</sup> Two months earlier, in a lecture to the Aberdeen Rotary Club, Cossar had reported that over 500 Craigiellinn boys had now been sent overseas, and urged local businessmen to give particular support to his Canadian work.<sup>36</sup>

Cossar's canvassing and publicity did not fall on deaf ears, for Craigiellinn was well supported by public subscriptions, and in 1927 it too received, like Cornton Vale, a substantial donation from the retired tea-planter Sir Leybourne Davidson to stimulate its colonial training scheme. In that year its accommodation was extended to admit 300 boys per year, and by 31 October 1928 a total of 1,076 boys had received training at Craigiellinn, of whom 734 had been sent overseas, 535 to Canada and 199 to Australia. Only 90 had been placed on farms in Scotland, generally because they had failed the

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<sup>33</sup> *P&J*, 15 Apr. 1924.

<sup>34</sup> *Montreal Star*, 15 Aug. 1924. See also NAC, RG 76, C-10647, vol. 568, file 811910, report by Charles Allan, Canadian Government Immigration Agent, 14 July 1924.

<sup>35</sup> *Highland News*, 31 Jan., 15 Aug. 1925; *P&J*, 29 June 1925.

<sup>36</sup> *P&J*, 1 May 1925.



dominions' medical.<sup>37</sup> The directors remained well satisfied with their work, which had grown despite competition from more glamorous emigration agencies which offered boys immediate transfer to the colonies without the apparent drudgery of preliminary testing. Although the directors were mostly Glasgow-based, Craigiellinn's recruitment field was Scotland-wide.

We have taken boys from every part of Scotland, ranging from the Shetland Isles to Berwickshire, and, while most of the boys were from the cities, we were glad to have a leavening from the country, who helped to make the others more contented by their outlook on life away from the crowd. From the advantage that has been taken of our extended accommodation, it is evident that there is an increasing desire among many boys to get overseas, and that the thoughtful parent values the opportunity of a preliminary testing. A satisfactory feature is the number of younger brothers coming, whose brothers were at Craigiellinn before emigrating.<sup>38</sup>

Like most of his contemporaries and predecessors, Cossar attempted to generate public support by peppering his annual reports with letters of gratitude and recommendation from successful emigrants. Perhaps because Australia was a less familiar and established destination than Canada, or perhaps because more recruits went there in the first year of the scheme, the 1923 Report included eight letters from boys at the Antipodes, but only one from Canada.<sup>39</sup> One recruit in Victoria had proved the validity of "rubber udder" training, and had already paved the way for another placement:

My training at Craigiellinn has come in more than useful, for the first thing I got to do was to milk a cow. The farmer asked me where I had learned and when I told him on a rubber cow at Craigiellinn, he burst into a fit of laughter. I explained what

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<sup>37</sup> NAC, RG 76, C-78221, file 2324636, Annual Report of the Cossar Boys' Training Farms Inc., 1927-28, by Duncan Watson.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> SRO, AF 51/171, Annual Report of the Cossar Boys' Training Farms Inc., 21 Dec. 1923. Between 9 September 1922 and 31 October 1923 191 boys had been enrolled at Craigiellinn, of whom 65 had gone to Australia and 42 to Canada.



it meant, and he said it was a capital idea. The farmer next door to us requires a boy, so my boss told him to get one of our boys when they land. Tell all the Craigiellinn boys it is a fine country and if they do what they are told and trust in God, they will get on. No matter where you go in Australia the "Scotch" are liked everywhere.

Several Australian correspondents thanked Cossar for giving them "the chance of a lifetime" and, mindful of their benefactor's priorities, stressed their spiritual as well as their economic well-being, if sometimes as an afterthought. "J.M." wrote from New South Wales:

We are very well satisfied with everything. We have learned to milk and turn our hand to all sorts of useful things. We are both getting 10/- per week and keep, and have started to pay back our passage money. On Sunday morning we go riding on horseback, so we manage to see a good deal of the country round, but we always try to attend the church as regular as we can. We have never regretted taking the chance you gave us. We hope to see more Craigiellinn boys out here, and we are sure that they will quite surprise themselves by the way they get on.

Two others, in Victoria and Tasmania, welcomed the way in which their employers made them part of the family circle, and the report also included four letters of assurance from Australian and Canadian employers to the emigrants' mothers. One Australian correspondent praised his son-in-law's recruit for demonstrating "those qualities of courage, perseverance and adaptability that make the Scotchman a good asset in whatever country he settles". Another, who seems to have been more solicitous of her charge than the boy's own mother, hinted at the prospect of secondary migration, thanks to her employee's good progress and reputation.

Because I am a mother I write to ease your mind, if possible, and tell you that we will do all we can to give Robert a good home in every sense of the word, and that when you come out to him you will find he will still be conducting himself as you would wish. He seems very happy and not at all homesick, but



says at times, 'I'll be real pleased when I get a letter from my mother.' Robert is [*sic*] such a happy disposition that I think he will make good friends anywhere, and he has made a good impression of the stamp of boys Scotland has, and one or two other people are going to see if there are more like him that they can get.

Appended to the 1927 annual report were ten illustrated letters from Cossar boys in New Zealand, Australia and Canada. One former city boy wrote from Taranaki, New Zealand, in praise of a country which offered modern conveniences in a familiar social environment. It was, he claimed, "an ideal country for outdoor work.... There is infinite variety, and even in the routine work the more experience one gets the more interesting it becomes". Three others wrote from Australia in slightly less enthusiastic vein, including one from a Queensland sheep station where the work was hard and the hours long, and one from Irriwarra, Victoria, who advised settlers to persevere even in unpalatable jobs and warned that "You've got to look after yourself if you want to be of any use to the country." The six letters from various parts of Canada were unanimous in their praise of the country and its opportunities. One correspondent, in his third year in Ontario, wrote:

I found Canada was as civilized as Britain. I will never regret coming here. We have all kinds of fun all the year round. After work is over we go swimming or fishing, or go riding round the countryside horseback. No more running around the streets of Glasgow for me again. I get my good meals day in and day out. Yes sir, I am enjoying life now. The country seems to grip a fellow, the longer you stay in it the more you like it. So I've become attached to Canada. I mean to have a farm soon, and bring the rest of the family.<sup>40</sup>

One of three correspondents in the Maritimes passed on his mother's request that his brother could be located in the same part of Nova Scotia when he came out to Canada, another urged Cossar to "tell the

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<sup>40</sup> Undated letter from "J.W." in Annual Report of the Cossar Boys' Training Farms, Inc., 1927-28.



boys at Craighielinn that they could not come to a better country”, and the third expressed delight with his domestic arrangements. “The people I am with think the world of me, they call me their son. They have a private car, and when they go out they take me with them. I am earning 12 dollars a month, they give me 6, and put the rest in the bank for me, and I think they are doing the right thing, for in later years I will need it, not just now”.

Not surprisingly, selected success stories and positive accounts of chain migration present only a partial picture of Cossar’s activities. Even the propagandist annual reports contain some hints of bad conduct, the “abandoning” of colonial life, and the damaging opposition raised against Cossar through negative press statements made by those who, he claimed, “were failures in the Colonies and, in many cases, misfits at home”.<sup>41</sup> Canadian Immigration Department files contain more explicit complaints about the deficiencies of Cossar boys – and their sponsor. As early as 1913, 60 citizens of Gagetown had petitioned the immigration authorities in Ottawa “with a view to stopping the frequent crimes which have been committed in our community, by the boys brought out here from the Old Country by Mr. Cossar and others”, asking that checks should be made to ensure that no recruits had a criminal record or had been inmates of a reformatory. Cossar dismissed the complaint as sectarianism on the part of the hostile Anglican majority in Gagetown, and pointed out that only two of his 200 recruits (neither of whom had a previous record) had turned out badly.<sup>42</sup> Boys were periodically deported for vagrancy, criminal convictions, illness, laziness, and unadaptability. Others were criticised for absconding from the Gagetown Farm, whose reputation suffered further when in 1925 the British Immigration and Colonisation Association decided to send all its delinquent boys there instead of returning them to Scotland.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Annual Report of the Cossar Boys’ Training Farms, Inc., 1923.

<sup>42</sup> NAC, RG 76, C-10647, vol. 568, file 811910, part 1, Rev. William Smith, Gagetown, to Dept of the Interior, 14 Oct. 1913; Cossar to W. D. Scott, Superintendent of Immigration, Ottawa, 6 Dec. 1913.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, C-7831, vol. 282, file 234646; *ibid.*, C-10646-7, vol. 567, file 811910, part 2, deportation order of 26 Mar. 1929; Cossar to F.C. Blair, Asst. Deputy Minister.



Employers sometimes complained that boys were undersized or spendthrift. One such derogatory – if not entirely damning – comment on recruit John Wemyss by a farmer at Andover, New Brunswick, was made to G. Bogue Smart and passed on by him to the superintendent at Gagetown:

John has but recently arrived. He is all legs and arms, and with the ever present cigarette, he looks like a centipede. Like all or more of Cossars Glasgow boys, he is an invertebrate [sic] smoker. In fact Farquhar (the employer) tells me he has drawn the entire \$6.00 for clothes and pocket money and spent it on cigarettes – leaving nothing to go towards clothes. He may pull through but it will take time. He is also very apt to tell lies. He is of good manners and attractive personality.<sup>44</sup>

In November 1924 a scathing attack on the management at Gagetown was made in a report by a former matron to G. G. Melvin, the Chief Medical Officer in Fredericton:

These boys seem never to be out of debt. After hiring out so many months there is always something to be paid out to the Meiklejohns.... Mr. and Mrs. Meiklejohn have been in charge of the farm for 14 or 15 years.... There is nothing to work with nor to cook with and the boys do their own cooking and washing. There is no sanitary arrangement; one lavatory which is used only by Mr. and Mrs. Meiklejohn to which they hold the key. No patent water-closet. The only water laid on is in the kitchen, by tap. There is no bathroom; no means of bodily washing; no tanks, no boilers, no hot water system.... The boys are neither well-fed nor properly clad.... They get neither butter nor milk and no meat except once in a long while. Meal and water and bread, stewed apple cooked without sugar, constitute their food. A boy of about 16 [is] at present doing the cooking. They are obliged to carry water

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Ottawa, 8 Aug. 1931; John Jackson to Blair, 15 Aug. 1931; J. Obed Smith to W.D. Scott, 22 Aug. 1917; Mr Meiklejohn to G. Bogue Smart, 23 Oct. 1925.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, C-10647, vol. 568, file 811910, part 1, G. Bogue Smart to John Jackson, 17 Aug. 1928.



from the Meiklejohn kitchen and if it does not suit Mrs. Meiklejohn when they come for water or food to give it, they do not get either until she is ready to do so. Last week end, there was no bread and the boy doing the cooking was ordered to make scones. He did so and Mrs. Meiklejohn wishing the oven took the half baked scones out of the oven and put them on the boys' table to be eaten by them. Mrs. Meiklejohn is apparently suffering from asthma or consumption and is not careful respecting sanitary aspect of the matter. The boys appear to be much afraid of both Mr. and Mrs. Meiklejohn. No one will remain as matron in the home. The boys rise at 5 A.M., and have no light in the morning. At night a stable lamp is placed on the table. The house is cold. Mr. Meiklejohn made the statement to Mrs. Waugh that the boys were liars and thieves and had been taken out of reformatories and gutters.<sup>45</sup>

Although Margaret Waugh's claims contradicted Dr Melvin's earlier impression that the boys were well nourished, and was challenged by Cossar on the grounds of the matron's unsuitability for the post of assistant to the sickly Mrs Meiklejohn, Smart found some of her complaints substantiated, and advised Cossar to renovate the buildings and improve procedure.<sup>46</sup>

Official opinion was divided about the calibre of the Meiklejohns' successor, John Jackson, a noted shorthorn breeder who arrived with his wife in 1927. M. J. Scobie, Manager of the British Immigration and Colonisation Association, spoke highly of the new superintendent, perhaps not surprisingly, given Cossar's close relationship with the Association.<sup>47</sup> Jackson incurred criticism from the Canadian immigration authorities, however, for his lax attention to selection of employers and after care, being more concerned with farm management and agricultural experimentation than with the welfare of the boys. He admitted that pressure of time sometimes prevented him from checking employers' references, homes were not

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, Waugh to Melvin, 14 Nov. 1924.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, memo by Smart, 20 Jan. 1925; Cossar to W. J. Egan, 6 Mar. 1925.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, C-10646-7, vol. 567, file 811910, part 3, Scobie to Blair, 13 Jan. 1932.



always visited in advance, and almost never thereafter, unless trouble arose, and there was no clear procedure for arranging indentures, ensuring regular payment of the boys' wages, answering their enquiries, or even keeping track of them.<sup>48</sup> Although deficient inspection was addressed by the appointment of one Captain Clingo in 1930, his task was complicated by the fact that Cossar's recruits were mostly older boys who, having "knocked about Glasgow for two or three years after leaving school", resented regulations about compulsory saving of wages and tended to find their own situations.<sup>49</sup> The scathing observations of D.J. Murphy, the Canadian Immigration Department's representative in St John, suggests that matters had deteriorated rather than improved by 1930. Writing to Smart, he claimed that his hard-hitting report simply reflected the opinions of many complainants.

There is no doubt but the boys in many cases are being exploited by employers, and in others, Cossar throws them in without a semblance of investigation. I find boys all over the country working on roads for their employers who give the lads none of the earnings although these same boys do the chores at night and morning in addition to milking etc.... In far the majority of cases I find Cossar's lads are farmed out without agreements, and seldom or ever do they get any real notice (outside of prayer circulars) and the loose check is not doing any good. Jackson lives in luxury and yet he can't keep boys about the place to give them some sort of idea of Canadian ways. I saw last year when there, grass growing out of his potato planter, that is not what boys should see on landing at the farm. Boys leave one job and find another on their own and it is all the same to Mr. J. As long as he is not worried, all is well. He is a farmer on the stock side, and has no real time for the most important of all work – the welfare of the boys. I also notice so often that I fear there is truth in my conviction, that after he gets the amount owing to Cossar

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, C-10647, vol. 568, file 811910, part 1, report by G. Bogue Smart on Cossar Farm, 21 Sept. 1929.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Jackson to Bogue Smart, 6 Apr. 1932.



for out fit, he is no longer vitally interested. It is only too self evident.<sup>50</sup>

Complaints were also made by a few dissatisfied boys and their parents. Glaswegian Hugh Paterson, 14, who went to the Cossar Farm with his 17-year-old brother William in July 1924, resented being pressurised to sign a contract which would prevent the brothers moving to Toronto where two sisters and another brother were already settled, and where his widowed mother was about to emigrate with two younger children. He also hinted that W. J. O'Brien of the British Immigration and Colonisation Association was the real power behind the Cossar enterprise:

Dear Mother,

I don't like starting this wrong but I've got to. The people from some Association here are trying to get us to sign a contract for a year, or rather to consent to the farmer signing it, to keep us for 1 year, the best pay being \$10 a month with some given to us for pocket money and some put in a bank somewhere nobody around here has heard of. Willie and I refused to consent until we had heard from Alec or you. He led us to believe it was his scheme but its the Orangemen here with a guy called O'Brien at the head of it, that's bringing us Protestant boys out. Cossar's only an agent, darn him. He never told us about contract or anything else and he said he would come round and see us all, but he came and just visited one fellow as far as I've heard, and he was a chap that came from 28 Monteith Row do you see through it? [Cossar lived at 23 Monteith Row, Glasgow]. They're just twisting the contract business round so as the farmer could have us for a year and work us like – like – the dickens for \$10 a month. I believe I could stick it for a year but I don't know about the boss sticking me. I'll sign the contract if you and Alec want me and so will Willie but if they come funny will show them how far a Scotsmans neck can shoot out. The man also

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, D.J. Murphy to G. Bogue Smart, 4 July 1930.



mentioned that we might be deported if we didn't sign. I asked him what for and he couldn't say.<sup>51</sup>

Cossar and his staff not only defended themselves against allegations of neglect, lax policy and deception; they also attacked restrictive dominion regulations which, in both Canada and Australia, led to the rejection of many applicants on the grounds of underdeveloped physique. The Australian Commonwealth Government and its selecting agents were accused by Cossar of inconsistency, bureaucratic short-sightedness and a reluctance to co-operate with private organisations such as his own. In January 1926, 75 per cent of the boys who applied through the Glasgow Labour Exchange for assisted emigration to Australia were rejected or had their applications deferred, and the following month not a single Glasgow applicant was accepted. Stung by the rejection of three "intelligent and physically fit" Craigielinn boys, Cossar complained:

So far as one can judge, the standard seems to vary with the representative and it would be of great assistance to those who are interested in the problem of the unemployed youth if a standard was set that it would be possible to expect a city boy to attain to. At present it seems a farce to invite boys, as is done through the Labour Exchanges, to come up to be interviewed by the Australian representative when this percentage is turned down and it is only fair, in my opinion, that the extreme unlikelihood, under present conditions, of boys under 18 years of age being accepted should be put clearly before the boys and their parents beforehand to prevent so many coming up just for the disappointment of being rejected in this wholesale manner.

It seems to me it would be only reasonable if Australia was to give boys who come from the poorer parts of our cities the same opportunity of going out as those who come from homes where conditions are better.... I trust there is enough well-informed public opinion in this country to waken up our friends in Australia to see that they have a real duty to this

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Hugh Paterson to his mother, "Sunday 6th" [Sept. 1924?].



portion of the Empire to take not only the cream (in the way of physique) of our population, but also to assist that class of boy who, through previous environment, is not yet up to the standard of a boy who has had the advantages of an English Public School and this work, (well worthy of Australia) of assisting in the development of these lads and girls who are healthy, but have not had the same opportunity of development, would not, I submit, prove unprofitable.<sup>52</sup>

Disputes with the Canadian immigration authorities increased after 1928, when – on Cossar’s own suggestion – New Brunswick handed over to Gagetown Farm responsibility for processing all the province’s assisted juvenile immigrants, making it the Provincial Training Centre for the reception, distribution and placement in New Brunswick of all boys recruited in the United Kingdom for that purpose under assisted passage agreements. Cossar was henceforth required to bring out 100 boys per year under his own auspices, as well as receive those recruited by other organisations, but his heightened role was a mixed blessing. On the one hand he seemed to have secured the future of his colonial training farm in an era of increasingly restricted operations, with the provincial and dominion governments now shouldering responsibility for placement and after-care.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand he felt the new arrangements had seriously reduced his independence and control over the venture which bore his name. Because the farm at Gagetown had been turned into a provincial reception centre, Cossar was unable to require all recruits – particularly those from rural areas – to undergo preliminary training at Craigiellin, as both he and John Jackson wished, and he suspected that his preference for “city boys of the poorer classes” was being eroded by the federal and provincial governments’ tendency to select rural recruits or boys who had received a secondary education.

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<sup>52</sup> SRO, AF/41, “Settlement of Boys in Australia and Elsewhere”, 6 Feb. 1926, Cossar to Sir Joseph Cook, Australian High Commissioner, quoting a letter which he threatened to send to the press. See also *Highland News*, 15 Aug. 1925.

<sup>53</sup> NAC, RG 76, C-7821, vol. 282, file 234636, J.A. Murray, Minister of Immigration and Industry, New Brunswick, to W. R. Little, Commissioner of Emigration, 7 Oct. 1927. See also *ibid.*, C-10260, vol. 356, file 397430, internal memorandum of the Dept of Immigration and Colonisation, Ottawa, 3 Jan. 1934.



Craigielinn trainees were then put at a further disadvantage, he claimed, by stringent new federal medical regulations, and after 1928 he complained frequently that enforcement of a minimum height requirement of five feet was resulting in two out of every three such trainees being rejected. Although he admitted that city-bred boys were often of below-average height before emigrating, he claimed that this did not impair their farming skills or their popularity with New Brunswick's farmers. But his threat to close down the Craigielinn centre and his proposal to take responsibility for the repatriation of any undersized boy who failed to find employment cut no ice with the dominion immigration authorities, which argued that since the farm at Gagetown had been designated a provincial training centre, it should set an example in securing only "strong, robust boys".<sup>54</sup>

Far from lowering standards, the federal immigration authorities responded to the deepening depression by encouraging juvenile migration societies to discontinue operations on the approach of winter. In 1929 Cossar had persuaded the New Brunswick authorities to allow his work to continue, but when he proposed to send out 60 boys between September 1930 and February 1931, the federal authorities warned the provincial government that it would be financially answerable for any concessions it made, and stated vehemently:

We killed the assisted farm labour movement by allowing unsuitable men to be included for assisted passage who were not farm labourers and never intended to be. This was on the pressure of transportation and other interests. The agricultural family movement was practically killed for the same reason. The trainee movement has come to an inglorious end because we allowed men to come who were not fit. Now pressure is concentrated on the juveniles and if we allow other interests than the interests of the boys themselves and the Province to which they are going, to govern the movement, we will put the juvenile movement where the others have gone.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, C-7821, vol. 282, file 234636, AGM of the Cossar Boys' Training Farms Inc., 26 Apr. 1929.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, C-110647, vol. 567, file 811910, Blair to Egan, 8 Sept. 1930.



Increasing tension between Cossar and the Canadian immigration authorities was reflected in a long-running correspondence about the criteria on which boys were judged. James Malcolm, the Canadian Government Emigration Agent in Glasgow – whom Cossar accused both of inconsistency in selection and a “blasphemous and rough” attitude – complained that Cossar knowingly submitted delinquents and boys who were medically unfit. He cited two cases from Edinburgh; one was an epileptic who had been referred to Cossar by the SSPCC after having been rejected earlier by the Canadian medical officers; the other was an illegitimate boy who, having been put on probation for theft, was one of 40 “problem cases” referred to Cossar by the Edinburgh Juvenile Organisations Committee between 1929 and 1931 with a view to emigration. According to the boy’s mother, “he had the choice of going to Canada or going to gaol, and he chose to go to Canada under Dr Cossar’s scheme”.<sup>56</sup> The Canadian immigration authorities, while sympathetic to Cossar’s desire to befriend “unfortunate waifs”, were, not unnaturally, anxious “that the material he helps from the gutter should be absorbed on the other side rather than sent to this country.... if he is fishing in such muddy waters in Edinburgh, he is likely to be doing it elsewhere and the percentage of runts and failures that he sends out absolutely justifies us in applying all the tests that have been applied in the past and probably a few more.”<sup>57</sup>

The Canadians also alleged that Cossar was guilty of double standards, pressing for relaxed entry regulations while at the same time abusing the government-subsidised charity rate by returning boys whom he deemed unsuitable on some trifling and precipitate excuse. In 1931, 20 boys were sent back to Scotland, including 11 failures and four on health grounds. As one Canadian civil servant commented crossly, “It is somewhat of an anomaly to find the Cossar people on the one hand asking us to help some more boys out this year and on the other hand having them send boys home whose only undesirability

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Immigration and Colonisation Dept Memo, 10 Apr. 1930, Malcolm to Little, 21 May 1931; Cossar to Little, 30 May 1931.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Blair to Murray, 24 June 1931.



so far as I can see is requiring several placements.”<sup>58</sup> Cossar was unmoved by senior immigration official F.C. Blair’s advice to “declare a holiday until conditions improve”, and remained determined to proceed despite the cessation of empire settlement funding in 1931.<sup>59</sup> In 1932, however, Craighielinn’s increasing financial difficulties led to its free transfer to the Church of Scotland’s Social Work Committee, and it was subsequently used as a training centre for youths on probation and potential delinquents until it was sold to Paisley Town Council in 1937.<sup>60</sup> At the same time the farm at Lower Gagetown functioned independently as a training centre for unemployed boys from eastern Canada, under Cossar’s renewed personal control and John Jackson’s superintendence. In 1945 Jackson and two associates purchased the farm from Cossar’s trustees, but in the changed post-war climate they were unsuccessful in their intention of re-establishing assisted immigration from Scotland.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps the most appropriate epitaph on Cossar was penned by the New Brunswick immigration agent D.J. Murphy, who, having observed his work in both Scotland and Canada, concluded in 1933 that “he means well but does not know how to go about it”.<sup>62</sup> In particular, he remained largely oblivious to the fact that his rescue work was not supplying the type of recruits demanded by either Canada or Australia. By 1926 he had fallen out with the Australian agents over their reluctance to accept Craighielinn trainees, despite repeated efforts by the Oversea Settlement Committee to explain the reasons and work out a compromise, and he never achieved his intention of establishing a training and distribution farm in

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, part 2, Blair to W.R. Little, Director of European Emigration, London, 25 Aug. 1931.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Blair to Cossar, 31 Aug. 1931, Little to Blair, 7 Sept. 1931.

<sup>60</sup> Church of Scotland, *Minutes of the Committee on Social Work*, 11 Mar. 1931, 19 Oct. 1932; *Minutes of the Committee on Christian Life and Work*, 7 Apr., 27 May 1937.

<sup>61</sup> *St John Telegraph Journal*, 18 Dec. 1929; 13 Oct. 1946; Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, MC 2402, Vera Ayling Records.

<sup>62</sup> NAC, RG 76, C-10647, vol. 567, file 811910, part 1, Murphy to Blair, 14 June 1933.



Australia.<sup>63</sup> Having operated the Canadian farm at his own expense from 1910 to 1928, he never really understood or accepted the principles of assisted migration under the Empire Settlement Act, and was irked at the restrictions placed on his activities after Gagetown became a provincial training centre. For Cossar, state involvement in migration was a two-edged sword, offering financial assistance with one hand while taking away freedom of selection with the other, and in 1930 he complained to the Secretary of State for Scotland that Canada was dictating policy to the Oversea Settlement Committee, so that “it is much harder for me to get boys away than it was before the Government gave assistance in the way of fares”.<sup>64</sup> G. Whiskard of the Oversea Settlement Department summed up the whole problem of state-assisted migration when he responded – sympathetically but negatively – to a request by Cossar for assistance in financing the passages of boys whom he regarded as suitable, but who had been rejected by the Canadian authorities, reminding him that while the philanthropist’s priority was the individual boy, the department’s priority was the general economic well-being of the empire.<sup>65</sup>

Although Cossar’s vision was frustrated and his name does not rank in the history books alongside those of Barnardo or Quarrier, his achievements were not insignificant. For more than two decades his work, which saw around 900 boys sent to Canada and 200 to Australia – almost 800 of them from Craighielinn – was relatively untainted by complaints from employers or accusations of exploitation from recruits. Not only were disadvantaged urban youths given opportunities which Scotland could not afford them thanks to training in the farming skills which the dominions required; the good reputation earned by Cossar also enabled him to exercise exceptional influence over the wider juvenile migration policy of New Brunswick even as other philanthropists began to retreat from that type of enterprise. The great majority of his recruits allegedly became successful farmers in the Maritimes, while others attained prominent positions in a variety of professions. One boy became a Beaverbrook

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<sup>63</sup> SRO, AF 51/174, G.F. Plant to Cossar, 16 Feb. 1926.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, Cossar to Hon. William Adamson, 26 Mar. 1930.

<sup>65</sup> NAC, RG 76, C-10647, vol. 567, file 811910, part 1, Whiskard to Cossar, 24 Feb. 1930.



Scholar at the University of New Brunswick, one became a leading fox rancher on Prince Edward Island; one held high office in the New York City Police Force; one returned to Scotland to serve on the staff of the Craigelinn Farm; and one became a Squadron Leader in the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War II.<sup>66</sup> Cossar himself died at Dunoon in 1942, as a result of exposure and heart disease suffered two years earlier when the ship on which he was escorting evacuee children to Canada was torpedoed in the Atlantic, and much of his estate was bequeathed to the juvenile rescue work he had so long supported.<sup>67</sup>

Although George Cossar's work was not affiliated to any particular church, Craigelinn, like Cornton Vale, was from 1927-30 used by the Scottish presbyterian churches as a training centre for would-be colonial farmers who went overseas under the auspices of the interdenominational Church Nomination Scheme administered by the YMCA. From its outset this scheme attracted a significant number of Scots, initially to Australia. On 23 October 1924 the *Press and Journal* intimated the forthcoming visit of the YMCA's Migration Representative to Aberdeen, along with an Australian delegate, to select 20 applicants for farm trainee positions in the Colac district of Victoria, as well as a few employees for the Camperdown, Gippsland and Hamilton districts. In June 1925 the Presbyterian Church in Australia asked the YMCA and the Scottish churches to secure 46 domestics and 36 boys for Victoria. Three months later it offered to place ten families per month in New South Wales, and in February 1926 J.C. Millikin, who was in Britain to recruit 120 families for New South Wales, explained the scheme's *raison d'être* to a meeting of the Aberdeen United Free Church Presbytery. The objective, he claimed, was to maintain the Britishness of Australia against "low class" Italian infiltration, by recruiting and nurturing presbyterian settlers, mainly for farming, but also for domestic service and artisan

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<sup>66</sup> Vera Ayling Records.

<sup>67</sup> According to an article in the *Saint John Telegraph Journal*, 13 Oct. 1948, Cossar was also involved, just before the outbreak of World War II, in a "cloak and dagger drama", rescuing more than 200 Jewish children from Nazi Germany. See also Cossar's Will, registered in the Books of the Lords of Council and Session, Edinburgh, 26 Aug. 1942, copy in Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.



employment.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile in Victoria, the Caledonian Society of Colac was particularly active in forging links with the Scottish YMCA, which for its part was happy to send boys to presbyterian farmers in an area which was “the centre of a large Scottish community”.<sup>69</sup> Youths were advised by the YMCA that Australia offered good farming opportunities to adaptable and hard-working recruits, provided they were of “good character, good health, good eyesight, and a reasonable standard of education”, and were willing to accept the long hours and loneliness of country life.<sup>70</sup> Untrained recruits could earn a minimum of ten shillings a week, with board and lodging, and the prospect of doubling their earnings after training on government farms or through state-supervised farm apprenticeships. YMCA welfare officers accompanied the emigrant parties, and their recommendations, reports of the voyage, and descriptions of Australian openings appeared regularly in the Association’s monthly journal, *Scottish Manhood*.

Letters from satisfied settlers, also published in the journal, were particularly important in giving the scheme credibility, all the more when they also asked for friends and family to be brought out under its auspices. For example, one emigrant from Fife wrote to the YMCA in 1926 after only a few months in Australia, announcing his intention of bringing out his parents and two brothers once he had acquired some land and asking the Association to assist the emigration of one of his former neighbours.<sup>71</sup> In the same month in which his letter was published, 100 emigrants left Scotland for Australia by the *SS Baradine* under the auspices of the Church Nomination Scheme, with subsequent sailings on 19 August and 14 October, and enthusiastic continuation of the scheme the following year. In July 1927 *Scottish Manhood* reported that since 95 per cent of the 120 families sent to New South Wales under Church Nomination during its first year had made good, the Presbyterian Church there was keen to extend recruitment to 240 families per year, and by 1930 a total of 1,500

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<sup>68</sup> *P&J*, 2 Feb. 1926.

<sup>69</sup> *Scottish Manhood*, Sept. 1927, 21.

<sup>70</sup> *The Scottish Red Triangle News*, May 1926, 14-15.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, June 1926, 21.



people had been settled at the Antipodes, mainly in farm work and domestic service.<sup>72</sup>

Even more recruits were sent across the Atlantic. In 1926 and 1927 the Migration Department liaised with the Canadian National Council of YMCAs in the recruitment of single men for farm service in the Dominion, but from January 1928 activity increased when the United Church of Canada took over sole responsibility for nominations. In 1928 and 1929 a particular effort was made to emigrate youths from the depressed mining communities of Central Scotland, beginning with two parties, mainly from Cowdenbeath, sent “from shadow to sunshine” in July and August 1928.<sup>73</sup> From the United Church’s receiving hostel at Norval, Ontario, a total of 132 boys was distributed to farms in the locality in 1928, apparently with such success that by 1929 the United Church was expressing its willingness to absorb a further 600 suitable Protestant youths. The boys – who were required to supply only their clothing and £1 landing money – were to be shipped out in fortnightly parties, under the charge of a YMCA Welfare Officer, and were to remain under the guardianship of the United Church of Canada until they had reached the age of 19, earning a minimum wage of ten shillings a week, with full board and lodging, on carefully-vetted farms.

According to *Scottish Manhood*, good reports from the 1928 contingent led to the recruitment of a further 17 boys from Cowdenbeath, with other recruits drawn from Lanarkshire, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, Orkney and Lewis.<sup>74</sup> A surprisingly realistic account of the experiences of the first party of 46 boys was later given by the accompanying welfare officer, George Simpson.

Our party included the unemployed lads from Lanarkshire, colliers from Cowdenbeath and Lochgelly, quondam Morningside message-boys, and the public schoolboy apparelled in plus-fours – a conglomeration with the smouldering fires of local patriotism, class-consciousness, and snobbery ready to burst into flame at any moment. Fortunately

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<sup>72</sup> *Scottish Manhood*, July 1927, 19; *ibid.*, Feb. 1930, 17.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 1928, 16.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, Mar. 1929, 17.



or otherwise, the Great Leveller, sea-sickness, laid practically everyone low on the first day out on the "Montroyal," and probably this did more to produce an *esprit de corps* than all the exhortations which I periodically delivered during the voyage.... On the whole it cannot be said that the ocean voyage is a very healthy experience for the boys, either physically or morally. The third class section of the "Montroyal" was overcrowded. Most people were too sick at the beginning of the week to take much interest in anything. Towards the end of the voyage the weather was so rough that everybody had to stay below, with the result that all the available accommodation was crowded out.... Ventilation below was poor, and usually had the effect of sending one to sleep in the more crowded parts. Food was abundant, but towards the end of the week tastes and smells began to pall on us, and we longed for really fresh food.<sup>75</sup>

The subsequent train journey offered some temporary relief, before the boys were subjected to the spartan regime and discipline of the Norval hostel, where they stayed for three days until farm placements were arranged. Here too Simpson was realistic about the problems encountered by city boys trying to adapt to farm life, but despite his reservations, he ended his report with a ringing endorsement of the nomination scheme.

Many boys will consider themselves fortunate to be placed in homes such as I saw, if they can conquer the initial homesickness. The work will be fairly hard, and the hours long, but they must be prepared to get used to that. If they are in difficulty at any time they are free to write or go to the Hostel. The farmer hands over the boy's wages every quarter to the Hostel to be banked in his name after his pocket money has been deducted. In this way it is possible for a boy to have saved \$100 at the end of his first year on the farm. The boy is not in the position of the farm servant in this country. He is treated as a member of the farmer's family, takes his meals

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, May 1929, 14.



with them, has his own room, and enjoys all the social life they have. Some would perhaps envy them this chance to begin all over again. For the boy with grit and determination, this is really the wonderful opportunity it is made out to be.<sup>76</sup>

During 1928 and 1929 a total of 647 British boys was placed in Canada under the Church Nomination Scheme. At least 90 per cent appeared to be doing well, and three employers were so impressed that they had arranged for the boys' families to join them. Only six had been deported, including two for medical reasons, and almost 60 per cent of recruits were still with their original employer. Success rates were slightly lower among the 715 single men who had also gone to Canada under YMCA auspices since April 1926, but in October 1929, 54 per cent were still contentedly employed in farm work.<sup>77</sup>

The YMCA was so convinced of the efficacy and increasing urgency of its migration work that in February 1930 it devoted a whole issue of *Scottish Manhood* to publicising its various initiatives. These initiatives, it was stressed, were completely disinterested, for the YMCA aimed not to make a profit as a booking agency, but to offer free advice and assistance to those with a "spirit of adventure", or, more particularly, a desire to escape from the threat or reality of unemployment. But such activities cost money, and included with the descriptions and commendations of the work in the dominions was a public appeal by the Chairman of the Scottish branch of the Migration Department for £5,000 with which to send 400 boys and 100 families to Canada during 1930.<sup>78</sup>

Also included in this special issue was a firm endorsement of the YMCA's work by the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, for by this time the YMCA was administering the Church Nomination Scheme not only on behalf of itself and its colonial contacts, but as the agent and clearing house for a number of home churches which had been persuaded to participate. In 1925 the Overseas Committee of the Church of Scotland sent a circular to all

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 1929, 16.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 1930, 7.



parish ministers, pointing out, as Thomas Pollock was to do later, the spiritual as well as practical benefits of an enterprise which provided the migrant both with work and with the immediate opportunity to worship in his new country "in the manner to which he has been accustomed".<sup>79</sup> Ministers were invited to alert their congregations to the scheme and were required to supply character references to accompany the application forms which would-be migrants submitted to Thomas Henderson, Secretary of the Church's Overseas Committee. An initial selection was made by the YMCA Migration Department, assisted by participating churches and other organisations, which within two years included the Free and United Free Churches, as well as the Church of Scotland and various English churches and societies. The names of selected applicants were then submitted to the appropriate dominion government office for approval.

The Scottish presbyterian churches promoted collective nomination through a joint committee, which liaised with the YMCA as well as organising preliminary training for recruits. The United Free Church of Scotland, which had for some time collaborated with the YMCA in home mission work, was enthusiastic about the arrangement from the outset, but the ultra-reformed Free Church of Scotland had a profound suspicion of worldly entanglements, not least through involvement with the YMCA, and only began to participate in 1927. It was persuaded to do so partly because it saw in the Church Nomination Scheme a means of influencing the emigrants' future environment, and partly because by 1927 this seemed to be almost the only way of persuading the increasingly reluctant dominions to accept colonists who faced a bleak economic future if they stayed in Scotland. As the *Monthly Record* observed:

There are inducements to the courageous in far off lands; but these countries have become critical of whom they will receive. Openings, with settlement on the land (for which most of Free Church people are suited), are not to be had by the penniless in any colony, unless the incomers be nominated

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<sup>79</sup> *Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland – Committee on the Church Overseas*, 1925, 341.



to the Colonial Government by a trustworthy colonist who will give them work to do. Colonial Governments go further, and accept collective nominations by Colonial Churches. These Churches, on the other hand, are ready to nominate for admission young people recommended to them by the Churches in this country.... Our readers will see how good a thing it is for outgoing young people to be welcomed in the colony by kindly churchmen and women, ready to find them employment and to give them the guidance and supervision of Christian friendliness.<sup>80</sup>

### **Paradoxes, Problems and Achievements**

Within three years of the *Monthly Record's* statement, however, the YMCA had ceased to send juveniles overseas, as had the Salvation Army, Quarrier's Homes, Cossar's Craigielinn and Gagetown farms, and Cornton Vale. As sponsors tried vainly to protect their enterprises from the chill wind of depression, one of the major – if most controversial – pillars of the imperialists' pre-war and inter-war programme came to a somewhat inglorious end. But the story of charitably-assisted emigration contains a number of paradoxes, particularly in the 1920s. Men like William Quarrier and William Booth had suffered no qualms about making assisted emigration an integral part of the institutions they founded, or about justifying their policies on the grounds of Christian social concern. By the 1920s these agencies had both an established reputation and a wealth of experience on which to draw, and although they welcomed the extra funding made available under the Empire Settlement Act, neither the integrity nor the continuation of their migration work depended on it. The same could not be said of many of the other agencies which were lured into launching migration schemes on the promise of shared funding, and which were subsequently faced not only with the practical problem of maintaining their momentum in the face of creeping economic depression, but also with ethical dilemmas arising from their inconsistent attitudes towards migration and their endorsement of popular eugenic, imperialist policies.

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<sup>80</sup> *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, Feb. 1927, 34.



In the Scottish presbyterian churches especially, assisted colonisation schemes sat uneasily alongside repeated outbursts of anti-emigration sentiment. Before the war the General Assemblies of both the Free and United Free Churches had in 1911 complained about the “menace” of an “exceedingly onerous” tide of emigration which was sweeping Scotland, claiming that since for a decade presbyterian emigration had largely surpassed the Roman Catholic Irish exodus from Scotland, national stability and the future of Protestantism were both under dire and imminent threat.<sup>81</sup> These xenophobic sentiments were reiterated much more stridently in the 1920s, when the Church and Nation Committee of the Church of Scotland regularly inveighed against the perceived threat to national presbyterian identity posed by an upsurge of Irish Catholic immigration into Central Scotland, set against a massive exodus of native Scots. Such was its concern that in 1923 the committee was given a remit to investigate “the menace to Scottish nationality and civilisation” caused by Irish immigration, and in the following year this was extended to include a study of the effects of emigration on the relative position of native-born Scots and incomers in the Scottish population. In 1925 the committee reported in some panic:

The Scots are leaving their native land in tens of thousands every year, and the non-Scottish population come in every day, and neither they nor their descendants emigrate to any appreciable extent. It is noteworthy that though there has been a very great emigration of Scots from Glasgow, yet the number of unemployed has remained more or less stationary for the last two years. While immigration continues unregulated and unrestricted, emigration affords no remedy for unemployment.<sup>82</sup>

A year later, after consulting with the other presbyterian churches, the Church and Nation Committee reiterated its concern about unemployment, immigration and emigration. For many Scots, it claimed:

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<sup>81</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 25, 27 May 1911.

<sup>82</sup> *Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland – Church and Nation Committee*, 1925, 724.



the position is growing so hopeless that their only chance of a decent livelihood is to emigrate, with the result that the industrial areas are being largely recruited from a people whose whole social, mental, and moral outlook is on a lower plane than that of the stalwart sons and daughters of our native hills and glens.... The Scot, who as a colonist is eagerly sought after by all the Dominions and by America, is being driven from his own shores, and his place taken by an immigrant who makes a very much less satisfactory citizen.<sup>83</sup>

Having witnessed no improvement in the situation by 1927, the committee urged government, employers and trade unions to co-operate in regulating immigration and in creating conditions conducive to the retention of native labour at home. And the national Church, it declared, should lead the way, having "clearly an obligation to defend Scottish nationality such as no other institution or organisation has.... If ever there was a call to the Church of Scotland to stand fast for what men rightly count dearest – their nationality and their traditions – that call is surely sounding now, when our race and our culture are faced with a peril which ... is the gravest with which the Scottish people have ever been confronted."<sup>84</sup>

The xenophobic mood of the national Church was clearly associated with considerable opposition to emigration. Its mood was echoed by the other presbyterian denominations. The Free Church in 1923 deplored the loss from the Highlands in particular of "young men and women in the freshness and vigour of early life" and complained in general that "in many parts of the country there is a steady flow of undesirables who are taking the place of the emigrants".<sup>85</sup> The United Free Church similarly argued that government attempts to relieve unemployment through assisted emigration schemes were "rendered futile by the fact that as fast as Scotsmen can be induced to emigrate Irishmen and others come over and fill their places ... and the peril is that our Protestant Church, in common with every other Scottish institution, will be swamped by an

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 1926, 620-21.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 1927, 1219-20.

<sup>85</sup> *The Monthly Record*, 1923, 67.



alien population having no sympathy with Scottish history, tradition, or custom.”<sup>86</sup>

But can the Scottish churches be accused of speaking with a forked tongue on these issues? If they were so implacably opposed to emigration on the grounds that it damaged Scotland’s religious identity as well as its economy by substituting ignorant, indolent and subversive Irish for stalwart, honest presbyterian Scots, why did they collaborate – with apparent enthusiasm – in so many schemes of assisted migration developed under the Empire Settlement Act? The answer seems to lie in the victory of expediency over ideology. The erosion of national identity at home made it all the more important to nurture that identity overseas, not least by fulfilling pastoral obligations to colonial brethren, particularly in group settlements.

It is no part of the Church’s duty to foster the departure of people from the Homeland, but the Empire Settlement Act of 1922 does encourage and seeks to regulate migration within the Empire, and very large numbers of people are leaving our shores. New groups of Scottish settlers are being formed in all parts of the world. Responsibility is laid upon us to provide them with the means of grace, for the Overseas Churches do not have ministers sufficient to meet the needs in old-established communities, far less to supply the immigrants with ordinances.<sup>87</sup>

But the churches went well beyond the passive delivery of religious ordinances. While deploring the economic ills which provoked much of the 1920s exodus, they admitted that not all emigration was a flight of unwilling refugees, and that even when unemployment was the trigger, emigration was both a palliative and a more desirable resort than the demoralising “dole”.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, they acknowledged their

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<sup>86</sup> *Reports to the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland, Report of the Church Life and Social Problems Committee, 1928, 16.*

<sup>87</sup> *Reports to the General Assembly of the UF Church, 1923, Colonial Committee Report, 4. See also Reports on the Schemes of the Church of Scotland – Colonial Committee, 1922, 218; Monthly Record, May 1924, 68; Sept. 1929, 230.*

<sup>88</sup> *Reports to the General Assembly of the UF Church, 1926, 619-20, 622; Monthly Record, May 1924, 96.*



Christian responsibility to protect and promote the temporal and spiritual interests of the adventurous and reluctant alike. Although this seemed to contradict their ideological opposition to emigration, they remained largely oblivious – at least in public – to the disparity between condemnatory rhetoric and positive pragmatism.

From such a perspective, church support for ventures such as the Cornton Vale and Craigelinn farms and the Church Nomination Scheme was a logical response to an existing demand, not an unsolicited and indiscriminate invitation to emigrate. If Scots were determined to leave, and were being encouraged by government incentives, then the churches' duty, they argued, was to help channel that tide of emigration to the empire rather than to the United States, to recruit only surplus labour, and to ensure that would-be colonists were properly tested, trained and supervised in agricultural pursuits before, during and after their removal overseas. Despite inevitable mistakes, the selection and training programmes which they set on foot, and their network of overseas contacts, helped to turn many unlikely recruits from the less privileged ranks of Scottish society into nominees acceptable to the cautious dominion governments. The demise of most voluntary society enterprises within less than a decade was due not so much to deficiencies in the churches' and charities' own policies, but to external economic circumstances beyond their control. While perhaps not a formative influence in the sense of initiating or driving policy, Christian charitable endeavour, emanating from churches and voluntary societies alike, undoubtedly played an important part in the mosaic of emigration from Scotland – and beyond – in the inter-war era.

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